

style trend

From hoarded to rewarded

Make space (and cash) by clearing out your pre-loved paraphernalia, writes **Jane Burton Taylor**.

The accumulation of material goods is a luxury but also a bane of modern Western life and it only increases as the years go by. Inheriting can double your collection; you can literally have someone else's lifetime of trappings dumped on you – the treasured along with the trash.

Most of us just live with that stuff: cram it into cupboards or hoard it in basements or attics that we only visit when packing up for one of those cyclic life moves. Some even hire storage space to take up the excess.

But there comes a time when you get the overwhelming urge to shed; to create a little space or make a change. When that day comes, have courage – decluttering, be it on a small or grand scale, has rewards.

Whatever you have hoarded – be it designer label dresses, old comic books, jewellery, radios, 1950s chairs or just general bric-a-brac – there is a way to clear it all out and make a little money, or at least convert it into something you really want.

How to value your goods

There are many ways to recycle or sell old furniture and odds and ends but to start, it's worth researching its potential value.

Gordon Brown, the "Roving Eye" antique expert on the ABC's *Collectors* (Friday, 8pm), says that in the case of antiques, rarity and quality will generally serve as clues about an item's value.

"To find a piece of interest like a sewing machine or old typewriter, there are millions of them," he says. "But an 18-seat dining room table, that is rare. [Similarly] general service war medals are comparatively common but one from the Boxer Rebellion, there were only about 200 of them."

As a rule of thumb, handmade as opposed to mass produced is more valuable. Antiques also tend to get more valuable with age. Mid-18th versus mid-19th century furniture, for example, will be more valuable because it has survived for 100 years longer, Brown says.

Sometimes there is a rare significance to a piece that causes its value to skyrocket.

Brown tells the story of a couch in Hamilton, Tasmania, which the *Collectors* followed to auction. It dated from the early 1800s and had been sitting in the owner's shed forever. She thought it might be worth a few thousand dollars because of its age and when she needed a new back fence, she put it into a local auction.

She was virtually in tears when bidding paused at \$58,000. It eventually sold for \$310,000 to the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, where it is now on display as one of Australia's earliest pieces of furniture.

Auction houses

There are numerous Sydney auction houses and they sell just about everything, from bric-a-brac to multimillion-dollar art. Check out websites and you will find most offer free online valuations. The main thing is to choose the right auction house and particular auction for what you are selling.

Lawsons (1A The Crescent, Annandale, 9566 2377) hosts a free valuation afternoon every Thursday and has a general estate auction every Friday. If you have a house full of goodies, they have valuers on the road who can assess your possessions.



"Sometimes people are downsizing from a five-bedroom house and we do the lot," says the managing director, Martin Farrah. "We go in and advise on what pieces will sell for and, in some instances, hold the auction on site."

Like most of the major auction houses, which offer similar services, Lawsons has themed auctions. For example, it holds dedicated auctions for wine and spirits and a monthly decorative art and antiques auction.

Bonhams & Goodman (7 Anderson Street, Double Bay, 9327 9900) holds regular fine-art auctions, as well as monthly affordable (up to \$1000) and fine jewellery auctions.

"People often inherit their great aunt or mother's jewellery," says the company's head of jewellery, Isabelle Quinn. "But they don't want to wear that style so they bring it to us."

Quinn says that while jewellery does have an intrinsic value, its resale value depends on its style, quality and desirability in the market.

Clothes

The Frock Exchange (221 Clovelly Road, Clovelly, 9664 9188) is a consignment store for



designer label clothes, one of a string of stores that includes the Belinda boutiques.

"People come in every day with recycled items, mostly which they bought overseas and in Belinda stores, and they are usually new," says Beatrice Pegard. "We take 50 per cent off the original value and when they sell, the person gets 50 per cent of the final sale price."

Di Nuovo (92 William Street, Paddington, 9361 4221) has been going for 16 years and sells high-end designer labels from the last three seasons. Clients range in age from 16 to 60, says the shop's owner, Victoria Barber.

"Four thousand five hundred people consign here and some arrive once a month with just a pair of jeans, others with a whole carload of clothes."

She generally prices items about 30 per cent to 50 per cent of their original retail value, depending on the year, and splits the sale price equally with the owner.

For older items, particularly formal clothes from earlier generations, try contacting The Vintage Clothing Shop, St James Arcade, on 9238 0090.

Books

If you have rare or first editions, seek advice from an auction house but for garden-variety books, try Berkelouw Books, which has outlets in Paddington and Leichhardt (9360 3200) or Gleebooks (9552 2526).

An interesting alternative is the Used Buy Bookshop (136 Cronulla Street, Cronulla, 9527 3504). They trade credits: you bring in used books and are given credits, with which you can buy books.

Furniture and homewares

Circa_c20 sells fine glass and ceramics from the 1920s on. Some pieces are highly sought after. Look for a signature or label, or visit Warren Harvey in his shop (78a Campbell Street, Surry Hills, 9212 2557). He takes 27 per cent of the sale price.

Redecorate (284 West Street, Cammeray, 9954 0440) resells home furnishings in good condition. The owner, Lynne Fricke, says she only sells things she would have in her own home. Goods range from candle holders to grand



Treasure from trash ... Redecorate owner Lynne Fricke only sells things she would have in her own home; (left) the owner of this sofa thought she'd sell it for a few thousand dollars. It was sold to the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery for \$310,000. Photos: Danielle Smith, Rohan Astley

'People come in every day with recycled items, mostly which they bought overseas.' Beatrice Pegard

and furniture by Australians Grant Featherston and Douglas Snelling. Patti Southern's Retro on Regent (88 Regent Street, Redfern, 0408 839 493) and Balmain sister shop Montague & Mabel are other outlets for furniture, bric-a-brac and "kitchenalia" from the '50s, '60s and '70s.

eBay

eBay is a catch-all for serious declutterers. As with conventional auctions, you can sell almost anything on eBay, from jewellery and artworks to jet skis.

eBay's Sian Gipslis says if you visit their website (ebay.com.au), it takes about 10 minutes to register.

She suggests sellers then research how much comparable items have sold for previously on eBay.

"It gives people a reasonable starting point, so they don't undervalue or overvalue," she says.

There is an "insertion fee" to sell on eBay. To sell a bed valued at \$600, for example, a listing with photo will cost \$4.49, Gipslis says. eBay then takes 5.25 per cent of the first \$75 and 2.75 per cent of the balance (\$18 for the bed).

More ways to declutter

There are, of course, many other ways to recycle your goodies. You can sell them at Trading Post online (tradingpost.com.au), set up a stall with a friend at a local market or, most traditional of all, hold a garage sale.

Whichever way you go, experienced declutterers advise doing it in your own time and aiming to really get rid of anything you don't love and need. It makes the things you trade or keep all the more meaningful.